

Guidelines for Asking Questions: A RECAP

Open Ended Questions: Used to obtain more detailed information.

How....How Much?....How many?

What if?

When?

Who?

What?

- What is your understanding of what led to your children being removed from the home?
- What do you need to do to get your children back?
- What progress have you made on the?
- What do you want the judge to know?
- What else would it be helpful for me to know about...?

Non directive questions: Used to elicit more responses.

- Tell me about...
- I'd like to hear more about....

Own your need for clarity

- I need some help understanding...
- Tell me more about.....

State conflicting information clearly

- Let me see if I understand you correctly...
- What I am hearing you say is...

Gather further information

- How does this appear to you?
- What do you think of that option?
- What compromises are you willing to make?

Closed ended questions: Used minimally to clarify and foster a commitment.

- Are you willing to...?
- When will you know...?
- How long will it take to....?

“Why” questions?: Avoid using Why questions as it insinuates that the person is wrong and places blame.

SOLUTION FOCUSED QUESTIONS

Solution Defining

These questions help family members define the who, what, why, where, when and how of the problem and the solution. It helps to identify the nature of the problem, but more importantly seeks solutions of defining who else is interested in this problem or who has information that might be helpful in solving the problem. Examples include:

- Under what circumstances is this likely to occur?
- Who is usually there?
- In what months, on what days of the week or at what time of day?
- When this happens, what do you do?
- What are the positives for you in continuing to stay in this situation?
- Who else is concerned about this problem for your family?
- What would have to be different for this problem to go away?
- How often did it happen last week?
- Where were you when _____ happened?

Past Successes

Through the interview process you can focus on the family's past successes; that is when they were functioning well enough not to require DHS intervention. It is empowering to the family member to realize that there was a period in his/her life when he/she was more successful than they may be feeling at this moment. Examples include:

- It's not easy to raise three children on your own. How did you do it?
- After having been through what you have, how did you find the strength to keep pushing on?
- What would it take for you to bring back the confidence you once had?
- What has and is making it possible for you to cope?
- What was happening in your life when you were getting along well as a family?
- What things have you done in your past to help you through difficult situations?

Miracle Questions

The miracle question literally asks someone to disregard their current troubles and imagine what their lives would be like in a successful future. It creates a vivid image or vision of what life will be like when the problem is solved. Examples include:

- Suppose one night there is a miracle while you were sleeping and the problem that brought you to DHS is solved. Since you are sleeping, you don't know the miracle has happened or that the problem is solved. What do you suppose you will notice that is different when you wake the next morning?
- If the miracle happened, what would be the first change you will notice about yourself?
- What would your partner notice different about you?
- What would you notice would be different around your house?

Scaling Questions

Scaling questions are an effective way to make a complex feature of a person's life more concrete and accessible for both the family member and the person asking the question. Scaling questions can be used to determine self-confidence, investment in change, prioritization of problems, perception of hopefulness, etc. They usually take the form of a number from 1 to 10 with 10 being positive and 1 being negative. Examples include:

- On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being pretty darn good and 1 meaning not good at all, how would you rate your confidence in your ability to overcome this problem?
- On the same scale how hopeful are you that this problem can be solved?
- On the same scale, how much would you say you are willing to work to solve the problem?
- What would be different in your life if you could move your answer up just one or two steps?

QUESTIONS FOR STRENGTHS AND CULTURAL DISCOVERY

For Family Members

- What were you like as a child?
- Who has had the biggest influence on your life?
- What makes you happy?
- Who are your closest friends and why are they special To you?
- What is the best time you ever had?
- What do you like to do in your free time?
- What is your neighborhood like?
- How did you meet your significant other?
- What are the best things about you? Your family? Your neighborhood?
- What do you admire the most about your parents?
- What do you like best about your son/daughter?
- How do you "blow off steam"?
- What was the best vacation you ever took? What made it the best?
- What makes you mad?
- What is your favorite TV shows, movies, books, etc .. ?
- Name a celebrity that is most like you.
- Describe the best time you ever had with your son/daughter?
- When was that and 'what was your life like at the time?
- Who helps you out when you're in a crisis?
- What is your most prized possession and why?

For Kids

- What is the best thing you can tell me about yourself?
- What are some of your favorite things?
- Who is your best friend and why?
- What do you value most in friendship?
- What would your best friend tell me about your personality?
- Tell me about your friends.
- If you could live anywhere, where would you live and why?
- Tell me about the best day you had with your mom/dad in last three months.
- What did you do and why was it a good day?
- Do you have a favorite pet? What do you like about your pet?
- Tell me two good things about your family? Your school? Your neighborhood?
- Whom in your family are you most life? In what ways?
- Whom do you admire most?
- Whom do you admire most in your family? In what ways?
- Where do you like to go to visit? What is it about that place?
- What's your favorite activity/sport? What do you like to watch on TV?

Questions for the Caseworker

1. What were the reasons the child came into care?
2. What efforts were made to avoid placement?
3. What steps have been taken to determine whether there are relatives that can be a placement option?
4. What is the permanency plan now and what progress has been made? And, what is your plan for the next six months?
5. What significant changes have occurred in the case since the report was written?
6. Who are the child's legal· parents? What is their involvement with the child? With the agency? With the care providers? Are they English proficient?
7. What is the status of the parent's relationship? Are the parents separated? If so, which one is receiving services for reunification?
8. Are the parents having visitation? If so, how often are they scheduled? Are they attending as scheduled? Are the visits supervised?
9. Are the siblings placed together? If not, are they having sibling visits?

10. How was a written service agreement developed with the parents? Is it in the primary language of the family? How has the child's culture been considered and used in the service agreement?
11. What services are being provided to the parents?
12. Are they participating in parent skill development? What is their progress?
13. What services are being provided to the child? to the placement provider?
14. What efforts were made to place the child in a culturally appropriate home?
15. What is the health and educational status of the child?
16. What else do I need to know about the case? Are there any new concerns?

Questions for the foster parent

1. Could you give a brief description of how the child is doing in your home?
2. What is the child's current physical status?
3. What services has the agency offered to you? Are there any services you need? Are you receiving any services relevant to the cultural needs of this child and family?
4. What are your thoughts about the plan as described by the caseworker?
5. How often do you have contact with the caseworker?
6. Are there any services you believe the child needs?
7. What are the educational needs of the child?
8. How would you describe your relationship with the child's parents?
9. What could improve your relationship with the birth family?